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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHISINAU 000730

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STATE FOR EUR/UMB, EUR/ACE, EUR/PPD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: IRI/NDI CRITICIZED IN MOLDOVAN PRESS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Rudolf V.Perina
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Government-controlled television and press gave long play July 3 and 4 to a story critical of IRI and NDI. In response to these articles, Embassy convened a meeting July 8 with representatives of both organizations. Embassy plans no public statement at this time, but IRI (which received the lion's share of criticism) might decide to make one. Charge will, however, privately raise concern about the media attacks during his meetings with Moldovan officials over the coming week. Pol/Econ Chief met with Deputy Foreign Minister Ostalep July 7 to provide Embassy point of view on the allegations. End Summary.

Media Criticisms of IRI and NDI Work

¶3. (C) A disgruntled IRI employee who had been fired after four years, Marian Bunescu, called a press conference July 2 in which he charged IRI was sponsoring another "orange" revolution and seeking to overthrow the government of Moldova. He also charged that the organization and its employees did not pay any taxes and called for a GOM investigation. Government-controlled Moldova-1 television gave unusually long coverage to this story on July 3, and the next day a long article appeared in the government mouthpiece "Moldova Suverena." The length and tone of the coverage gives rise to concerns of a government effort to discredit IRI and NDI as the 2009 elections approach.

Embassy Meeting with IRI and NDI Representatives

¶4. (C) Charge Perina convened a meeting July 8 with IRI and NDI to discuss the media attacks. IRI Country Director Steve Rader reported that Christian Democratic (PPCD) Party leader Iurie Rosca (whose party now votes in informal alliance with the Communists) had threatened that President Voronin might kick IRI out of the country if the organization continues its efforts to help opposition parties unite in coalition. NDI Country Director Alex Grigorievs similarly reported that he had heard indirectly that President Voronin had expressed anger about the work of IRI and NDI. Both NDI and IRI believe that the recent press coverage would not have been possible without GOM support.

¶5. (C) IRI reported that the organization has not yet decided if it will issue a statement. Steve Rader is discussing this option with DC

headquarters. Charge stated that the Embassy will not respond publicly at this time but keep the option open if similar articles continue. However, the Charge promised he would express his concerns about the false allegations in the articles during his meetings with government officials over the coming week.

IRI/NDI Issues Also Discussed with MFA

¶6. (C) Pol/Econ Chief met July 7 with Deputy Foreign Minister Ostalep, who had called to inquire about some of the charges against IRI and NDI. Embassy rep stressed our support for free and fair elections, IRI/NDI's training for all political parties, and the USG's record as a reliable partner providing assistance for the GOM. The Deputy Foreign Minister said that his concerns were not so much about the political allegations (which he acknowledged were absurd) but rather about charges that the organizations and their employees are not paying taxes. P/E Chief explained that under the Vienna Convention, and in agreement with the MFA, Embassy does not pay taxes for its employees, but rather they are responsible for paying on their own. IRI and NDI, despite having a status different from the Embassy's, have similar terms in contracts with their employees.

Comment

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¶8. (C) We believe the disgruntled ex-IRI employee's situation provided a target of opportunity for the GOM. In the run-up to the 2009 elections, President Voronin's biggest fear is that the opposition parties will succeed in putting together a successful coalition that could outnumber the PCRM. Though IRI and NDI make efforts to include the PCRM in their program, the Communists have for the most part declined participation. We believe that at this point any public rebuttal of the articles should be left to the IRI, but Charge will privately convey concerns about the absurd allegations in the media attacks and Embassy will continue to monitor the press for any similar criticism.

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